

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS PT. 3

Habakkuk 3

For the last two weeks, we have looked into the small book written by the prophet, Habakkuk, one of the 12 books of the Old Testament known as the Minor Prophets, and we've dealt with the subject "Seeking answers to life's tough questions."

Today we will look into Part 3 of this series and the third chapter of Habakkuk, where we will see a different Habakkuk than we have seen for the last couple of weeks – a Habakkuk who has had many of his questions answered.

Habakkuk was probably the last prophet who spoke to the people of Judah concerning the imminent judgment of God as a result of their rebellion against His Law and for their idolatry and their wickedness.

In the first chapter, we heard Habakkuk express himself to God in a very forward manner – not just praying and inquiring of God, but arguing with Him and demanding answers to his prayers.

Habakkuk was wearied from the violence and wickedness and injustice he was witnessing among his own people – the nation of Judah – the last remaining vestige of the chosen people of God since the destruction and the dispersion of the northern ten tribes of Israel by the Assyrians.

Habakkuk demanded an answer from God – and God answered, though not in the manner or with the message that Habakkuk had expected.

In chapter two, God makes it exceedingly clear to Habakkuk that He – God – is in perfect control of this world and that He has a plan for dealing, not only with the sins of Israel, but also with the nation of Babylon because of their own sin of arrogance and pride and idolatry.

If chapter one is about **condemnation**, then the theme of chapter two is **justification**. And now we come to chapter three, where the theme is **adoration**.

At the end of chapter two, God ends His answer by saying...

Hab. 2:20 But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.

By the time God finishes His answer, something radical has taken place in the heart and life of Habakkuk. For the moment, he is silent.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
Shouts for God's justice	Stands silently in awe	Searches out for mercy in wrath
Wrestling	Waiting	Worshipping
Protesting	Patient	Praising

Chapter 1: "God, why are you silent?"

Chapter 3: "God, I am silenced by Your speaking."

Here in living color we see the effect of the word of God on the rebellious and hardened heart. God waited on Habakkuk to finish his rant (a practice I would not recommend to anyone to attempt) and then He answered with authority and power mixed with such grace and the promise of redemption that Habakkuk is brought to his knees in God's presence.

And then he begins to praise and to worship.

The quality of the content of chapter three is so different from the previous chapters that some commentators argue that this chapter is not really a part of the original book of Habakkuk.

Yet its content is so radical to demonstrate a point. Remember that the words of the Bible were written by men but they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. There is no error in this chapter being associated with those that precede it.

Here is a demonstration of the power of God to bring the human soul into submission simply by the pronouncement of His words and His will.

Read Habakkuk 3.1-2

One commentator described this chapter as "a lyrical poem composed under strong mental excitement." It is certain that Habakkuk's mind has had much to deal with throughout this ordeal. He has come to a new understanding of who God is and how He carries out His will among men.

This chapter is in fact a psalm, similar to other psalms recorded in the Old Testament. It was intended to be sung, though how or by whom is uncertain.

Yet it is a perfect example of what happens within the human soul that is yielded to the lordship of Christ.

In verse 2, Habakkuk expresses in prayer his worship and praise of God.

O LORD, I have heard thy speech, (words)

"I have heard the report of you."

Habakkuk knows who God is and of His works in the past days of Israel's history. Hearing God's answer in chapter 2 reminded Habakkuk who it was that he was arguing with...

...and was afraid: (worship)

Hearing does not equal horror, but holiness.

God's response did not bring terror, but it fostered awe and reverence – the fear of a believer.

Remember that the Bible says, "***Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.***"

O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known;

I have seen your hand of mercy actively involved in the deliverance of your people (e.g. the Exodus).

I seek that now once again in our lifetime.

In seasons of adversity, it often seems that God is silent – as if He has hidden himself from those who seek Him.

Job 23:9 When God is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him.

Ps. 89:46 How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?

Isaiah 8:17 I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.

So Habakkuk prays that God will not hide Himself from His chosen people but instead...

...in wrath remember mercy.

In verses 3-15, Habakkuk celebrates the majesty and the power of God in poetry that is almost beyond comprehension. It is certain that we do not use such language in our ordinary conversation and seldom read such a colorful display of words.

Habakkuk has, in these next several verses, created a tapestry that demonstrates the wrath of God in operation and has woven into it the strands of redemption and deliverance creating with these words a blanket of warmth and comfort, even in light of the judgment that is soon to follow.

Read Habakkuk 3-15.

Each commentary that you read about these verses takes a different approach in explaining them. Some say that Habakkuk is reflecting on God's demonstration of power in the past during the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai and the victory over the nations which inhabited the Promised Land.

Others say that Habakkuk is celebrating beforehand the deliverance of Israel from the captivity of Babylon. He is not happy that God is working out His plan of redemption through this method, but he is submitted to God's will and rejoices in the miracle of God's divine hand.

I believe that we ought not to worry too much about those details and should revel in the glory of God that is demonstrated in this vision that God gave to Habakkuk.

Read v. 3-5 again.

The words that Habakkuk wrote here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit sound very much like words that had been written before in the OT.

Deut. 33.1 Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death. 2 He said, "The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them. 3 Indeed, He loves the people; all Your holy ones are in Your hand, and they followed in Your steps; Everyone receives of Your words." (NAS95)

In verses 3-5, there is the appearance like a mighty storm brewing in the south, coming from the regions below the Dead Sea in the direction of Mt. Sinai. This dark and powerful cloud lowers over the earth, as it did over Mt. Sinai during the time of Moses, with flashes of

lightning and the echoes of thunder which cause the very earth to tremble and shake and awakens a sense of dread and awe in the hearts of those who witness it.

Read verse 6 again.

The power of God, revealed through the power of this massive storm, continues to advance until it seems to hover just above the ground as if taking measure of where it will strike first, and then all of the power that is contained in the clouds – which conceal the sight of God from those who are witnessing the vision – breaks forth and the nations are scattered, the mountains are swept away, and the sea flees from before His face.

Psalm 77.16 When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. 17 The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side. 18 The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook. 19 Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen. 20 You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. (ESV)

Now armed with the weapons of His wrath – His bow, His arrows, His spear – God unleashes His judgment on the nations and in verses 12-13, He threshes the heathen in anger and goes forth to secure the salvation of His people.

By His mighty hand He parts the Red Sea and makes the River Jordan stand in its banks to form dry land and destroys cities and entire armies as though they were chaff before the wind.

Then in verse 16...**Read.**

If, in...

- **chapter one**, Habakkuk was standing with his hands in the air, making demands of God, and in
- **chapter two** he stands with his hands on his hips waiting for God to respond, now, in
- **chapter three**, we see him prostrate before the Lord, his hands extended before him in adoration and praise.

Having heard all that God has promised, Habakkuk's stomach begins to turn over inside him and his heart to race, his lips quiver, and his bones become like jelly, causing him to collapse in the presence of such power.

He is yielded to the idea of God's judgment on the wickedness and the idolatry of the people of Israel and the coming of the Babylonians as God's tool of His wrath, yet his hope is not dead in him because he understands that when God disciplines His people, it is only for a season.

So we hear him in submission as he closes his letter...

Read v. 17-19.

William Cowper, the English poet who suffered from acute mental distress and illness, knew this personally, for he cast Habakkuk's testimony into these great lines:

Though vine nor fig tree neither
Their wonted fruits should bear,
Though all the fields should wither,
Nor flocks nor herds be there;
Yet, God the same abiding,
His praise shall tune my voice;
For, while in him confiding,
I cannot but rejoice.

Today, we are not as familiar with these agricultural terms of fig trees and vines, of fields and flocks and herds. If we were to write this today, we might say it like this...

Though the Social Security fund is depleted,
Though the stock market crashes,
Though my insurance company goes bankrupt
and my IRA account vaporizes;
Though I lose my job or my business fails,
I will rejoice because of the Lord.

-- Bob Deffinbaugh

Apart from faith in the living God – apart from the salvation that can be found in no other except the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no hope for any man.

If we are to find joy in this life and in this generation, we must find it in Christ.

Heb. 9:28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

2 Peter 3:12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

Rev. 22:20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

God told Habakkuk to write down the vision, to publish it where it could be read and understood easily, so that they who read it will run with the message throughout all the world.